

# U.S. NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR UNESCO Monthly Update

FEBRUARY 2005

Volume I, Issue 1



U.S. Department of State



International Organizations Bureau



## Comments from the Executive Director

Welcome to the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO. This update is the first of planned monthly correspondence to inform the commission and others interested in UNESCO of major issues and upcoming items in the fields of education, science, culture and communications. Please feel free to pass along this update to interested friends and colleagues.

Again, congratulations to commission members on your appointments, which became effective on January 1, 2005. The expertise that you provide will be of great value, and we are eager for your involvement in the many issues in which UNESCO is involved.

## Education

Director General of UNESCO Koïchiro Matsuura announced in late December that Dr. Peter Smith, an American and the president of California State University-Monterey, will be UNESCO's new Assistant Director General for Education. His bio can be found at: <http://csumb.edu/administration/smith.html>. Dr. Smith will begin his duties in June.

Director General Matsuura and Georgetown University President John DeGioia are hosting a conference entitled "The United States, UNESCO and *Education for All*: Calling Higher Education to a Higher Calling" at Georgetown University on February 28, 2005. The conference will focus on the role of higher education in promoting the goals of the *Education for All* initiative, with particular focus on the unique contribution of the United States.

UNESCO  
is the lead  
agency for the  
United  
Nations'  
Literacy  
Decade:  
Education for



Photo: Laura Bush at UNESCO  
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All (2003-2012). Activities throughout the decade will focus international attention on the critical need for literacy skills throughout the world. Priorities, as stated in the International Plan of Action, include research, monitoring and evaluation, and capacity building. First Lady Laura Bush serves as the Goodwill Ambassador of the Literacy Decade.

As the lead agency for both [Education for All](#) and the U. N. Literacy Decade, UNESCO is preparing to launch an initiative to assist member states in achieving universal literacy. The U.S. Mission to UNESCO has been actively engaged in supporting this priority and is working closely with the UNESCO Secretariat and others to develop an effective program. More information on this proposal will follow in the future.

The U.N. General Assembly proclaimed 2005 as the International Year for Sport and Physical Education, as a means to promote education, health, development and peace ([A/RES/58/5](#)). UNESCO is already engaged in the drafting of an International Convention against Doping in Sport, and was named lead organization for the year.

In 2002, the U.N. General Assembly designated 2005-2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. UNESCO was designated the lead agency and has been active in planning a considerable number of events to pursue the Decade's ultimate vision: achieving a quality education that supports environmental sustainability. More information about the Decade, including a calendar of events and the draft [International Implementation Scheme](#), is available on UNESCO's website.

The December tsunami in the Indian Ocean disrupted education around the region and, in some cases, destroyed critical school infrastructure and systems. UNESCO responded by offering immediate emergency assistance and is now focusing on the long-term needs of education reconstruction and

rehabilitation. UNESCO has been working closely with other agencies in the field to support reconstruction efforts, and has focused their work with governments in four priority areas:

- 1) Providing policy advice and support on preventive and inclusive education (including reconstructing schools and teacher training institutions with equal facilities for men and women);
- 2) Training teachers in post-trauma counseling and assistance for children and parents;
- 3) Providing training aimed at economic reintegration for families who have been deprived of jobs (including functional literacy and vocation skills training); and, once stability has been reached,
- 4) Encouraging community involvement in school rehabilitation.

More information about UNESCO's response is updated periodically. Specific information on immediate education assistance can be found through the [Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies](#). General information about the UN response can be found at the [U.N. News Center](#).

## Science

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) was hosted in Kobe, Japan, Jan. 18-22, 2005, on the tenth year memorial of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Originating from the Johannesburg Summit in Sustainable Development, the original focus of the conference was broad-based, with a common theme of building resilience to natural disasters. UNESCO organized several thematic sessions at the conference focused on a broad range of topics, including the International Flood Initiative and the International Programme on Landslides, protection of cultural heritage sites during disasters, and mitigation of the impact of earthquakes.

The tragic effects of the December 26, 2004 earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean focused international attention on ways to prevent such tragedies from recurring. While it is not possible to prevent natural disasters, it is possible to reduce both human and economic risks by providing real-time detection and people-centered early warning services, including communication and education, to communities at risk. UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC,

[www.unesco.ioc.org](http://www.unesco.ioc.org)) has played a pivotal role in this arena.

In 1965, UNESCO's IOC founded a Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii that operates jointly with the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The center operates a network of ocean buoys and seismic sensors, collects and analyzes data acquired by them, and alerts its 26 member countries in the Pacific region of impending tsunamis. In response to the Indian Ocean tsunami, the international community is now engaged in broad discussions on how to best develop a global multi-hazard early warning system. The U.S. strongly supports expansion of the current UNESCO warning system to the Indian Ocean region and other ocean basins, within the multilateral framework of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), which will include *in situ* and remotely sensed observations acquired, processed, and disseminated freely to the international community in standardized formats.

The IOC is a subsidiary body of UNESCO and is supported by the UNESCO general budget and extrabudgetary contributions. Its core programs include implementation of the Global Ocean Observation System (GOOS), promotion of International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE), and capacity building for oceans science and technology. The U.S. has strongly supported the IOC for decades and continued to provide voluntary contributions and in-kind support to the IOC during the U.S. absence from UNESCO. Currently, the U.S. also supports the IOC through its UNESCO dues.

The IOC plays a critical role in international ocean sciences, including but not limited to predicting and mitigating the effects of natural disasters. Its importance to the U.S. and the international community is likely to continue to grow.



Photo: Oceanographic buoys ©NOAA  
Commander Emily B. Christman

In the social sciences arena, UNESCO is currently working to develop a declaration of Universal Norms on Bioethics. Groups of experts, specifically the International Bioethics Committee (IBC) and the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee (IGBC), of which the U.S. is a member, have developed an outline of a text. The IGBC and IBC met in Paris, the week of January 24, to discuss the Fourth Outline of a text (available at [www.unesco.org/bioethics](http://www.unesco.org/bioethics)). Following these discussions, the IBC will develop a final draft outline, which will be considered by UNESCO Member States in the intergovernmental negotiation sessions in March and June 2005.

The U.S. supports the development of a declaration on bioethics that identifies unifying principles of bioethics that can serve as a touchstone for all countries in their efforts to address the increasingly complex issues of bioethics.

In comments on the draft outline, the U.S. has emphasized the importance of clearly defining the scope of the declaration and developing a document that is clear, useful, and can be enthusiastically supported by member states. Critical elements in such a declaration are: a focus on the protection of human beings; recognition of the risks and benefits of technological development; and an emphasis on pursuing developments in medical and life sciences with full respect for human life, human dignity and fundamental freedoms. The most recent draft outline, however, encompasses matters well beyond this scope.

### Communications and Information

In recent months, UNESCO continued its efforts to provide and strengthen communication and information facilities in local communities with its International Initiative for Community

Multimedia Centers. More information found at: <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/cmc>



Radio GED in Barbados was one of the first radio stations to participate in the CMC project.

In reaction to the tsunami that devastated South Asia, UNESCO made an appeal to the international community for \$600,000 to provide immediate assistance in order to restore radio broadcasting in Aceh, Indonesia.

### Culture

UNESCO is developing an international convention on cultural diversity. In 2001, the member states of UNESCO adopted a "Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity," which emphasizes the principles of pluralism, respect for human rights, promotion of creativity, and international solidarity.

In an effort to expand upon the Universal Declaration, the UNESCO General Assembly decided that "the question of cultural diversity as regards the protection of the diversity of cultural contents and artistic expression should be the subject of an international convention."

The assembly invited Director General Matsuura to submit to the general assembly in 2005 a preliminary report setting out the situation to be regulated and the possible scope of the regulating action proposed, accompanied by a preliminary draft of a convention.

In September 2004, the United States, as a Member State of UNESCO, participated in an intergovernmental meeting to discuss general issues regarding a possible convention and to review a draft document. Louise Oliver, US ambassador to UNESCO, Robert Martin, director of Institute of Museum and Library Services, and Dana Gioia, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, led the U.S. delegation.

An inter-governmental meeting will be held in Paris during the first two weeks of February to continue [negotiations on the convention](#). The U.S. Government supports a UNESCO convention on cultural diversity that will expand cultural liberty, without limiting individual choices or stifling creativity and cultural development. The current draft convention, however, attempts to both address cultural diversity broadly and to focus narrowly on the contemporary commercial production of specific products. Currently, it does neither well.



The current draft convention would justify government-imposed restrictions on an individual's access to information as well as on the circulation and trade of some goods and services. These are inconsistent with UNESCO's constitution, which calls for UNESCO to "recommend such international agreements as may be necessary to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image."

The U.S. could support a convention that actually promotes cultural diversity, both within and among nations. Such a convention must encourage an environment that promotes access to cultural and artistic expressions. Freedom to disseminate content from all cultures and languages must be preserved, as must the individual's freedom to access the culture of his or her choice.

UNESCO could use this opportunity to clearly state its opposition to any attempts to restrict or legislate against specific cultures or languages or to restrict dissemination of cultural expression and content.

A convention must be consistent with other international agreements. The draft convention would authorize states to take measures inconsistent with their obligations under other international agreements and also includes a settlement of disputes clause, indicating how possible contradictions could be resolved.

The U. S. is actively engaged in the negotiation of this convention and will continue its efforts to develop a convention that will create a global environment that will promote cultural diversity.

### News from Paris

Ambassador Louise Oliver participated in January in negotiating sessions on the International Convention Against Doping in Sport. She also has been engaged in discussions on the declaration of Universal Norms on Bioethics and meetings on higher education guidelines and literacy.

### Job Vacancies

Based on a U.N. formula, which includes factors such as total population and the level of a country's U.N. financial contribution, as well as geographic representation and positions levels, UNESCO classified the United States upon reentry as an *underrepresented* member state.

There are a variety of positions open in the UNESCO organization including: translators, general service, and professional posts. Professional posts (P) range from junior professionals P-1/P-2, to middle-ranking professionals P-3/P-4, to management professionals and directors P-5 and D-1/D-2.

Some positions listed on UNESCO's website <http://recrutweb.unesco.org/> include:

- Director, International Institute for Education Planning – IIEP (D-2) (Paris) (closing date: 3 Mar. '05)
- Administrator, International Institute for Education Planning- IIEP (P-5) (Paris) (closing date: 9 Feb. '05)
- Program Specialist, Natural Science Southern African Development Community Countries (P-4) (Harare, Zimbabwe) (closing date: 20 Mar. '05)
- Information Technology Manager, Institute for Statistics (P-4) (Montreal) (closing date: 22 Feb. '05)

### Interesting Links

Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), an international initiative launched by the United States in 2003, of which the Tsunami warning systems are but one component of GOOS

<http://earthobservations.org/>

Volunteering for World Heritage Projects

<http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=71&l=en>

